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POPULATION INFORMATION NETWORK FOR AFRICA (POPIN-AFRICA) INVENTORY OF ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE PLANS

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POPULATION INFORMATION NETWORK FOR AFRICA (POPIN-AFRICA): INVENTORY OF ACTIVITIES AND FUTURE PLANS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The World Population Plan of Action adopted at Bucharest, Romania, in 1974 recommended that measures should be taken to facilitate knowledge of the interrelationships between population and development. The Plan also requested governments to consider the dissemination of population information as a means of creating an awareness of population problems in planning social and economic development.

2. Although there is an increasing awareness of population problems among some governments and researchers in Africa, much work still remains to be done to create an awareness of population and socio-economic development problems. Consequently, the need to collect, process and disseminate population information is becoming increasingly important. This need is forcefully reflected in resolution 366(XIV) adopted by the Fifth Conference of Ministers of the Economic Commission for Africa held at Rabat, Morocco in 1979; the resolution requested among other things the Executive Secretary of ECA to expand and improve the activities of the Secretariat in the field of population information and documentation. That request was supported by resolution 400(XV) on priority population programme adopted at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Among other things the resolution requested the Executive Secretary of ECA to intensify the Commission's activities in the field of population information, dissemination and documentation.

3. Following the evaluation mission of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) in 1979 on the activities of the Population Division with respect to documentation and information, a recommendation was made to give priority to such activities.

4. With the financial assistance of UNFPA and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada, the Population Division of ECA held a consultative meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 14 to 16 June 1982 to discuss the establishment of the Population Information Network for Africa. At the end of its deliberations, the consultative meeting recommended that the information network called POPIN-AFRICA, should be established within the Population Division of ECA. The membership of POPIN-AFRICA would be open to institutions and organizations such as information centres, libraries, universities, United Nations agencies and other agencies which were involved in documentation and population information collection and dissemination. POPIN-AFRICA would thus be a regional component of the International Population Information Network (POPIN) established in January 1981 within the Population Division of the United Nations at New York. With respect to the financing of POPIN-AFRICA activities, the ECA Population Division had put forward a draft financing programme covering the period 1984 to 1986.

5. The objectives of POPIN-AFRICA were defined as follows:

Long-term objectives

(i) to assist in the formulation of sound population policies and programmes by providing ready access to population information;

(ii) to provide and establish better ways of improving the flow of population information among institutions and organizations dealing with population information-related activities in Africa;

(iii) to assist in developing common norms and standards to ensure compatible systems and services on population information flow in ECA member States;

(iv) to assist in developing appropriate population information infrastructures in member States through advisory services including the training of librarians and documentalists for the collection, processing and dissemination of population information;

(v) to develop mechanisms for the continuous monitoring and evaluation of population information activities in Africa to ensure the effectiveness of the network (POPIN-AFRICA) in meeting the needs of its users.

Short-term objectives:

(i) to identify institutions that could become members of POPIN-AFRICA, establish an administrative framework and agree on the division of responsibilities and contribution of each of the institutions to the activities of POPIN-AFRICA;

(ii) to establish a committee of advisers whose role willbe to give guidance on POPIN-AFRICA policies,

(iii) to strengthen the information services already managed by the Population Information and Documentation System for Africa (PIDSA), of the Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS) in order to ensure that they operate well;

(iv) to establish information services similar to the Institut de Formation et de Recherche Demographique (IFORD) the Cairo Demographic Centre (CDC), and the Sahel Institute and to ensure that the African region is well covered by POPIN-AFRICA;

(v) to establish POPIN-AFRICA files on population projects statistics and bibliographies, and to disseminate such information regularly throughout Africa;

(vi) to collaborate with members of the International Population Information Network (POPIN) in order to strengthen the operations of POPIN-AFRICA.

6. The administrative structure of POPIN-AFRICA including a co-ordination unit as envisaged and recommended by the June 1982 consultative meeting, was based on the decentralization of activities in favour of African regional population institutions and organizations. Co-ordination would be carried out through periodic consultative meetings and the establishment of a central file, the POPIN-FILE, from which any type of information would be available. This implied that common standards in the form of common work sheets for inputs into the POPIN-FILE would have to be devised.

7. A consultative meeting will be convened in New York (1-3 November, 1983) on the division of responsibilities among sub-regional institutions and ECA. The meeting assigned subject and geographical areas to each institution and the co-ordination unit at ECA.

II. THE ROLE OF POPIN-AFRICA

A. Users and their needs

8. One of the tasks of POPIN-AFRICA will be to identify users of its services and their needs. The Population Division already has two lists of users - individual users and institutions. The users can be divided into groups according to their requirements and the type of information they need.

Decision-makers and political authorities

9. This group of users includes government authorities and administrators. They need already analysed information to find quick answers to population questions of a political nature. They want to be clearly informed about the political implications of information and other alternatives. The type of information that decision-makers and political authorities require is made up of the resolutions and recommendations from national and international meetings or conferences; information on population projects; and lists of current and future events in the area of population and population and development.

10. Machinery will be estahlished to send this type of information to member States. The first type of machinery that comes to mind will be needed to disseminate information in the form of publications. The mass media, radios newspapers and group meetings will be utilized to disseminate the information.

Researchers

11. This group of users comprises specialists in various fields from academic and teaching institutions. They are involved in the analysis of information, studies and the conduct and assessment of population projections in order to give advice on policy decisions.

12. These users have to obtain working documents from international organizations and meetings. Moreover, they need bibliographies on specific subjects, copies of publications, summaries of documents, statistical data as well as manuals and questionnaires in the field of population, and population and development. In line with its work programme, POPIN-AFRICA will produce and publish bibliographies and document summaries. Statistical data, documents and other types of information will be made available to users.

13. It should be noted that some bibliographies on Africa have now been produced and published. The bibliographical bulletin of the Sahel documentation Centre published by Michigan State University has information on books, articles, reports and unpublished documents on various aspects of socio-economic development of Sahelian countries namely, Cape Verde, Chad, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Upper Volta. However, those bibliographies focus on agricultural data for social and economic development. Moreover, the Sahel documentation Centre at Bamako, Mali publishes a specialized bibliography on demography which covers the Sahel. The Regional Institute for Population Studies at the University of Ghana publishes P IDSA ABSTRACTS which contains information on books, articles, reports and unpublished documents on Africa in the area of demography and population studies. Mention should also be made of DEVINDEX AFRICA, an index on publications relating to economic and social development in Africa which is prepared and published by the (PADIS) of ECA. DEVINDEX AFRICA covers various aspects of information on Africa in the areas of: agriculture, demography, communications, education, food and nutrition, health, rural development, technology, transport and trade.

Programme administrators

14. This concerns programmes in various population and population and development areas such as family planning, medicine and nursing, rural health, and local government administration. The executive personnel of programmes in these areas constitute a group of users of data made available by POPIN-AFRICA. Consequently, the administrators who implement specific programmes require specialized information. The collection, classification and dissemination of data on African and non-African countries will be absolutely essential to those administrators.

Other users

15. The role of POPIN-AFRICA will not solely be restricted to the above-mentioned users. Booksellers, documentalists, information specialists and journalists will also be users of such information because their role is important in disseminating the information made available in Africa and about Africa by POPIN-AFRICA.

B. Activities

16. The categories of users determine the types of information required which include quantitative (statistics) and qualitative information, information on projects and bibliographic.

17. The types of information required determine the sources of information that will be tapped. Exchange and dissemination machinery will be established once the information is made available.

Information sources

18. There are two types of information services: those that produce information themselves and disseminate them and those that collect information produced by others in order to disseminate them. One of the primary tasks of POPIN-AFRICA will be to identify such sources of information in Africa and elsewhere and to evaluate the documents they have in terms of quantity and quality. Some examples of such sources are:

(a) Government information services

19. In each African country, government institutions or services are responsible for collecting various types of data including population data. Statistics departments produce and disseminate statistics including demographic data in several forms: reports on population censuses; economic and demographic reports; illustrated brochures and posters on family planning programmes and activities; information bulletins and statistical year books.

20. Information is disseminated and distributed under these various forms to individuals and institutions upon request both within and outside Africa. The ECA Population Division receives and continues to receive the same information from government institutions and services.

(b) Non-governmental information services

21. There are now national family planning associations which are affiliated to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in more than 10 African countries. These associations are involved in field work which comprises training, teaching, communications and mass-education in family planning. IPPF has a well organized information exchange system designed to disseminate the results of its work using national family planning associations both within and outside Africa. Mention should also be made of universities, research and teaching institutions in African countries which publish the results of their research both within and outside Africa , as well as universities, teaching and research institutions established outside Africa but part of whose population activities concern Africa.

(c) Regional and international institutions

22. The list of such institutions is not exhaustive; a comprehensive inventory will be required when POPIN-AFRICA is fully operational.

(i) Institut Africain pour le developpement Economique et Social (INADES), Abidjan, Ivory Coast

23. The Institute deals with various aspects of economic and social development in Africa. It provides assistance in areas such as population information, education and communications relevant to agriculture; informal population education; communications programmes using libraries and documentation centres.

(ii) African Social Studies Programme (ASSP), Nairobi, Kenya

24. ASSP has established an African population education centre and publishes educational material on population.

(iii) Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Dakar, Senegal

25. The role of CODESRIA, which was established in 1974 is to organize and co-ordinate the activities of all the institutions for research and teaching of social sciences in Africa. To carry out its role, CODESRIA is in contact with more than 100 institutions established in 38 independent African States. Its activities are focused on the following subjects: population policies and family planning programmes; demographic transition; employment, education, health and development and migration. CODESRIA publishes articles, books, research directories, scientific journals and information bulletins.

(iv) Centre Regional d'Etudes de Population (CREP), Bangui, Central African Republic

26. CREP was established in 1975 by the member States of the Customs and Economic Union of Central African States (UDEAC) namely, the Central African Republic, the Congo, Gabon and the United Republic of Cameroon. The aim of the Centre is to initiate and co-ordinate demographic research in the member States, improve the collection of basic population information, carry out studies on demographic factors and relationships between demographic factors and economic and social development factors. CREP also provides technical assistance to member States in training nationals and establishing and developing documentation centres.

(v) Centre for African Family Studies (CAFS), Nairobi, Kenya

27. CAFS which is a regional bureau of IPPF, concentrates its activities on training and technical assistance in the area of family planning information. The information and documentation unit of the centre provides assistance to national family planning associations to develop and organize their own documentation units.

(vi) Reseau Sahelien de Documentation (RESADOC), Sahel Institute, Bamako, Mali

28. RESADOC which was established in 1979 is a subregional network responsible for collecting, processing and disseminating information on development, research and training in the member States of the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) namely, Upper Volta, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad, Gambia and Cape Verde. As mentioned above, RESADOC prepares and publishes a specialized bibliography on demography and a demographic bulletin which covers various aspects of economic and social development in the Sahel region.

(vii) Library and Documentation Centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Nairobi, Kenya

29. The Centre collects documents and information on environmental programmes, publishes information bulletins and lists of periodicals from several countries. It also distributes documents on the United Nations Conference on the Environment, UNEP documents, project reports and United Nations documents on other subjects.

(viii) Cairo Demographic Centre (CDC) Cairo, Egypt

30. CDC is an interregional centre of the United Nations which covers Asian and African countries in the area of research and education on demography. The Centre publishes its research results in the form of monographs, articles and working documents on various aspects of population.

(ix) Institut de formation et de Recherche Demographiques (IFORD), Yaounde, The United Republic of Cameroon

31. IFORD is a subregional training institute of the United Nations which covers French-speaking African countries. The Institute publishes the results of its research in "Annales de l'IFORD" and "Demographie Africaine".

(x) Population Information and Documentation System for Africa (PIDSA), Legon, Ghana

32. PIDSA is administered by the United Nations Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS). The aim of PIDSA, which was established in 1978, is to collect information on books, articles, reports and unpublished documents in French and English on Africa. As mentioned earlier on, PIDSA publishes such information in "PIDSA ABSTRACTS".

(xi) The United Nations, United Nations regional commissions and and specialized agencies

33. The United Nations and its organs are another major source of information on population and related matters.

34. One of the tasks of POPIN-AFRICA will be to make an inventory of population data on Africa for collection and dissemination. The services, institutions and organizations that produce such data or information will be invited to become members of POPIN-AFRICA.

Other activities

(a) Training courses

35. Training courses will be organized for the staff of Africa-based centres participating in POPIN-AFRICA; the courses will cover among other things, norms and standard procedures for understanding and processing material including classification categories which help to describe contents of documents. It should be noted that there are specialized dictionaries which contain such classification categories and which are used in documentation. One such dictionary is the Population Multilingual Thesaurus published by the Committee for International Co-ordination of National Research in Demography (CICRED). The training courses will also focus on methods to be used to ensure that information circulates effectively among members of POPIN-AFRICA.

(b) Collection of documents and information

36. An inventory to be carried out among members of POPIN-AFRICA will make it possible to collect documents and information on population in Africa. By compiling a list of users and their needs, the inventory will reveal any shortcomings with respect to documents and information.

(c) Information files

37. There are plans to establish central computer-stored files at ECA. Some bibliographical and other types of information will be physically kept and consulted at ECA; on the other hand, only certain types of information could be obtained from the computer banks at ECA. The actual physical files will be kept at the information centres that produced them.

38. The Pan-African Documentation and Information System (PADIS) will assist POPIN-AFRICA with the establishment and development of information files and with the designing of data storage and consulting mechanisms.

39. The following files will be established:

(i) POPIN-CORE: a file on African and foreign specialists in the field of population and population in relation to social and economic development: the ECA Population Division already publishes an African Directory of Demographers.The file will also contain information on on-going regional, national and local government and non-government research projects on Africa. Emphasis could be put on: the methodological aspects which could be of assistance to other researchers in the same field; and a directory of Universities and teaching institutions with emphasis on the subjects, level and duration of teaching programmes.

(ii) POPIN-PROM: a file on United Nations population projects and programmes on Africa. It will also contain similar information produced by other organizations or institutions including information on projects and programmes prepared and implemented by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

(iii) POPIN-STAT: this file will contain quantitative and qualitative information such as demographic data, bibliographical information containing a list of theses, studies and memoires written by students and major reports on population seminars, conferences and meetings. It should be noted that quantitative data will be supplied by a data base currently being established by the ECA Statistics Division, since the PADIS-STAT file will contain such data there is no need to establish another file. Various users, including POPIN-AFRICA member organizations will have access to the data base for various requirements. More specifically, in the implementation of the publications programme of POPIN-AFRICA, data will be analysed and disseminated in various forms as described in this document.

(d) Co-ordination of the activities of subregional centres

40. Each subregional institution namely, PIDSA/RIPS, IFORD, CDC, RESADOC will be responsible for the areas and zones to be covered; their activities will be co-ordinated. An Advisory Committee will be established to advice on co-ordination and other technical problems relating to the functioning of POPIN-AFRICA. The Advisory Committee is expected to meet once a year.

41. Moreover, a working group meeting will be held each year and training courses will be organized in order to strengthen the activities of sub-regional and national institutions.

(e) International participation and collaboration

42. Some documentation and information centres or systems are already members of the International Population Information Network (POPIN) of the United Nations Population Division in New York: the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada and the Latin American Population Documentation System (DOCPAL) are two such member organizations. Co-operation agreements will be signed with those centres in the area of teachnical assistance; IDRC and DOCPAL will be invited to participate in the establishment and development of various files of POPIN-AFRICA.

43. The assistance of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and programme executing agencies will be sought in collecting information on such programmes in Africa in order to establish the POPIN-PROM file.

44. The co-operation of other POPIN members will be sought in exchanging information to make access to the data base possible. Currently, there are three computerized data bases: POPLINE, Population Bibliography and DOCPAL.

45. POPLINE is a documentation and information system which contains more than 100,000 published and unpublished documents relating to population, family planning and bio-medicine. POPLINE was established from the data bases established by the Johns Hopkins University Population Information Programme, the Columbia University Centre for Population and Family Health and the Population Index of Princeton University.

46. Population Bibliography of the North Carolina University Population Centre contains about 50,000 documents on population. DOCPAL which was mentioned earlier on, is under the United Nations Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE).

47. The experience and expertise of all the above systems will be of considerable assistance to the running of POPIN-AFRICA because in addition to technical assistance, it will be possible to obtain population information on Africa under various forms such as published and unpublished documents, discs and magnetic tapes which can be converted to"MINISIS" and which are useable in Africa. MINISIS is a set of computer programmes used to store and search for bibliographic information on computers.

III. EXCHANGE AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

48. Universities, and governmental and non-governmental teaching and research institutions in Africa have informal programmes for disseminating their information. There is not yet a formal, well-organized and well-structured system for exchanging documents and other information. However, IPPF has such a formal system using affiliated associations throughout the world particularly in Africa.

49. One of the objectives of POPIN-AFRICA will be to establish an information exchange and dissemination network. To achieve that aim, the following arrangements are planned under activities:

A. Requests for information

50. As it has already been mentioned, the Population Division of ECA has a list of about 2,000 users and bibliographical information are regularly sent to those users. Moreover, such informations are sent to individuals, governmental and non-governmental research and teaching institutions upon request. The same services are also made available to staff members of the Economic Commission for Africa.

51. Bibliographical information is provided as copies of documents or by looking through bibliographies for specific data or referring users to bibliographical information available at ECA or outside ECA. Where such information are outside, a written request will be made by the user himself of the Population Division to obtain the data. There is also a documents lending service.

52. In future, and in line with the programme of activities of POPIN-AFRICA, efforts will be made to (1) expand, diversify and enrich the collection of bibliographies in Africa, (2) inform as many users as regularly as possible about the availability of such information; and, (3) develop a network for exchanging and disseminating it so that it will actually get to users. The main concern of subregional institutions and POPIN-AFRICA is to fully play the role of documentation and information centres on Africa.

B. Bibliographies

53. As already mentioned, population bibliographies are published on Africa especially PIDSA ABSTRACTS, bibliographical bulletins on the Sahel and "Devindex Africa". Other subjects that are not treated in the above bibliographies such as health, food and nutrition, housing, employment and education, relationships between population and social and economic development should be covered. The POPIN-AFRICA Consultative Meeting held in New York on 1-3 November 1983 decided that all the above informations will be published in a single bibliography called POPIN-AFRICA Index.

C. Publications

54. Publications form part of POPIN-AFRICA's information activities programme.

(i) POPIN-AFRICA News

55. It is planned to publish information in the following manner:

(a) on persons engaged in population activities relating to Africa: their appointment, functions and movement; (b) on African countries: any population-related activity in a country and about a country will be published; (c) miscellaneous regional and international population information; (d) summaries of the results of research carried out by the Population Division of ECA, subregional institutions and other member institutions of POPIN-AFRICA; (e) a schedule of planned population seminars, meetings and conferences.

(ii) African Population Newsletter

56. Information on population projects and programmes on Africa will be published in the bulletin as well as projects and programmes on population and social and economic development.

57. The bulletin will also publish the following information: (a) reports on major population seminars, meetings and conferences; (b) a guide to major on-going regional, national and local research projects focusing on methodological aspects which could be of assistance to various persons doing research work on African population; (c) an annual summary of miscellaneous published and unpublished demographic information on African countries: the summary will be accompanied by commentaries on demographic trends; (d) updated population policies of African countries.

(iii) POPIN-AFRICA Population Bulletin

58. The bulletin will publish articles on (a) the inter-relationships between population and social and economic development in Africa; and (b) methodological and theoretical aspects which relate to studies on population and social and economic development in Africa.

IV. CONCLUSION

59. Documentation and information activities in Africa are obviously important; resolutions 366(XIV) and 400(XV) mentioned above give legal backing to government action in that respect. Decisions relating to social and economic development policies require information on the demographic, social and economic status of populations.

60. The programme of activities of POPIN-AFRICA was designed to respond to such requirements because activities will be focused on data collection, processing and dissemination. To carry out those tasks, the participation and collaboration of national, international, governmental and non-governmental population information centres will be absolutely indispensable; they will be invited to become members and to contribute to the activities of POPIN-AFRICA.

61. Subregional research and teaching institutions namely PIDSA/RIPS, RESADOC/Sahel Institute already have experience in data processing and publication of bibliographies. However, the subject matter treated should be diversified and the scope of activities should be broadened to cover and serve the whole African continent. International centres that have experience in collecting data on African will also be contacted for assistance.

62. In addition to the above-mentioned mechanisms for information dissemination, agreements will have to be signed with news agencies such as the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) based in Dakar, Senegal, Information meant for the public and political authorities could also be broadcoast by news agencies.